



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
WEDNESDAY, JULY 28, 2010
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NINE SENTENCED FOR ROLES IN MARRIAGE FRAUD SCHEME

COLUMBUS – Nine people who pleaded guilty to charges connected with their involvement in a scheme in central Ohio to arrange marriages between foreign nationals and U.S. citizens in order to evade U.S. immigration laws were sentenced in United States District Court here today.

Carter M. Stewart, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Ohio, and Brian Moskowitz, Special Agent in Charge, ICE Office of Investigations in Ohio and Michigan, announced the sentences imposed today by U.S. District Judge Algenon L. Marbley.

Sentences were imposed on:

- * Hasan Salohutdinov, 28, of Dublin, Ohio and an illegal alien from Uzbekistan. Salohutdinov was sentenced to 15 months imprisonment followed by deportation. He pleaded guilty on April 5, 2010 to one count of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud and one count of presenting false statements to U.S. immigration authorities. Salohutdinov introduced other Uzbeks into the scheme in order that they might pay to engage in sham marriages.
- * Dmitry Pani, 28, Dublin and an illegal alien from Estonia, was sentenced to one year imprisonment. Pani also pleaded guilty to one count of conspiracy to commit marriage fraud.
- * Sviatlana A. Piskunova, 22, Columbus, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and was sentenced to time served.
- * Laura Elizabeth Grace Scott, 20, Columbus, pleaded guilty to conspiracy and was sentenced to two years probation which includes six months of home confinement.
- * Courtnie Susann Good, Columbus, pleaded guilty to marriage fraud and was sentenced to two years probation which includes six months of home confinement with electronic monitoring.
- * Elbek A. Saidjanov, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania pleaded guilty to marriage fraud and was sentenced to time served, about seven and one-half months.
- * Iskander Odilovich Tairov, 20, Galloway, pleaded guilty to marriage fraud and was sentenced to two years probation.
- * Brent James Woods, 25, Columbus, pleaded guilty to marriage fraud and was sentenced to four years probation including four months in Alvis House.
- * Djafar B. Sobirov, 29, Columbus, pleaded guilty to marriage fraud and was sentenced to two years probation.

Pani established an informal “business” to find U.S. citizens who would accept money to enter into sham marriages with aliens for the purpose of evading a provision of the immigration laws of the United States, and to aid and abet in the making of false statements to immigration authorities with respect to those sham marriages in an effort to convince the immigration authorities that they were genuine marriages.

Salohutdinov, who had entered into a sham marriage in Illinois, moved to Ohio and came to know Pani. Salohutdinov and Piskunova joined the conspiracy with Pani and arranged sham marriages for certain other aliens known to Salohutdinov.

Typically the sham marriages occurred shortly after the alien and the U.S. citizen met each other, sometimes on the same day. Saidjanov, an alien, came to Columbus from Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, and paid Pani to arrange a sham marriage on February 9, 2009 with Good. Saidjanov also paid for his girlfriend, who is an alien, too, to enter into a sham marriage on the following day. These sham marriages took place at The Columbus Wedding Chapel, 761 South High Street in Columbus, Ohio. After the marriages, Saidjanov and his girlfriend returned to Philadelphia, and did not live with their new American spouses.

"Today's sentences are a reminder that America's legal immigration system is not for sale," Brian Moskowitz, special agent in charge for ICE Homeland Security Investigations in Detroit. "ICE will aggressively investigate and bring to justice those who seek to compromise the integrity of that system for personal profit or to avoid immigration laws."

Stewart commended the investigation by ICE agents, and the assistance of the ICE Office of Detention and Removal, U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, and the Columbus Police Department, and Assistant U.S. Attorney Dan Brown, who prosecuted the case.

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